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Intelligence Memorandum

*The Khmer Insurgent Factions and the Influence
Of Peking, Hanoi, and Moscow Thereon*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Khmer Insurgent Factions and the Influence
Of Peking, Hanoi, and Moscow Thereon

1. Most of the factionalism which exists within the Khmer insurgency has centered--at least since 1970--around the question of Sihanouk's role in any future realignment of political forces in Cambodia. It is also clear that the relationship of Peking and Hanoi to the insurgents is closely tied to their view of Sihanouk and his potential future role.

2. The quantity and quality of our information on the leadership, size and foreign orientation of the various factions among the Khmer insurgents leaves much to be desired. Nevertheless, at the time of Sihanouk's visit to Cambodia this past March, there were three broad groupings in the insurgency:*

--The first group--and the most important--consists of hard-core Khmer Communists. It seems reasonable to assume that these Communists have closer ties to Hanoi than to Peking because of their longer standing direct contacts with the North Vietnamese. Many of them have received extensive political indoctrination and military training in North Vietnam. But some of these hard-core elements consider themselves nationalists as well as Communists, and they almost certainly desire to maintain their independence from Vietnamese control.

--The second group, the Khmer Rouge, is made up of those insurgents whose opposition to Sihanouk predates his ouster in 1970.

**One result of the visit, of course, was to create at least the appearance of greater unity among these groups.*

--The third group, the Khmer Rumdoh,* is made up of those insurgents who have consistently called for Sihanouk's restoration to power in Cambodia.

3. Most of the ordinary members of the latter two groups probably are more leftist than Communist, and undoubtedly have far less political clout than the Khmer Communists. Hard-core Communists play an important, behind-the-scenes leadership role in both of the other two factions, but do not control the other two factions completely. Despite their political differences, all these groups have been able to work together well militarily. At the same time, their combat capabilities have been heavily dependent on the Chinese for the provision of military aid and on the North Vietnamese for its delivery and for other forms of military support.

4. The Sihanouk complication has not been confined to the in-country insurgency. An uneasy marriage of political convenience has also been reflected in the Peking-based "Royal Government of National Union." The Khmer insurgents are ostensibly an arm of that "government" and its associated front group, the "National United Front of Kampuchea." As such, they supposedly are under the control of Sihanouk and his nationalist-minded "prime minister," Penn Nouth. But Khmer Communist interests in Peking--and perhaps Hanoi as well--most likely are represented by Ieng Sary and his fellow Khmer Communist officials in the Peking exile structure. We have no useful evidence on the degree of influence which Peking exercises on Ieng Sary, Penn Nouth, and other Cambodian exiles in Peking beyond the fact that superficially at least these individuals support Sihanouk's policies. These policies, in turn, do appear closely tied to Peking's interests.

5. As indicated above, the problem of factionalism appears to have been reduced--if only temporarily and on the surface--by Sihanouk's recent visit to

*The Cambodian word rumdoh means "liberation." "Khmer Rumdoh" is the equivalent of "Khmer Liberation" (Movement).

"liberated" areas in Cambodia. From all indications, the central purposes behind that undertaking seem to have been to enhance the "legitimacy" of Sihanouk and his "government" and to give Sihanouk and the Khmer Communist leaders of the "resistance" the chance to try to reconcile their differences. Upon his return to Hanoi from Cambodia, Sihanouk claimed that both of these objectives had been realized. With regard to his political relations with insurgent leaders, he emphasized that as a result of his discussions with them they fully supported him as their "chief of state." This endorsement, when added to those Sihanouk had already been given by Peking and Hanoi, capped the efforts of the Chinese and North Vietnamese to make Sihanouk the focal point on the Communist side in any subsequent negotiations for a cease-fire and a political settlement in Cambodia.

6. The public relations between Sihanouk and the Khmer Communists remain cordial and cooperative. In a press interview in Romania late last month, Sihanouk stated that the Khmer Communists had told him that he would be chief of state "until the end of his life." He also quoted Ieng Sary as saying that he, Sihanouk, was "the cement, the guarantee of the union of the Cambodians." During the same interview, Sihanouk made a deferential bow of his own toward the Khmer Communists when he indicated that it was up to them to decide whether or not there should be any direct negotiations with the US.

7. Despite this surface sweetness and light, the real relationship between Sihanouk and the Khmer Communist leadership is clearly quite fragile.

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Hanoi's View

8. If Sihanouk is hard for the Khmer Communists to swallow, he also poses a difficult political problem for the North Vietnamese. Hanoi, like Peking, endorses Sihanouk and his "government" as the sole legitimate Cambodian political authority, but there is good reason to believe that the North Vietnamese stamp of approval is less enthusiastic than the Chinese. Whereas the Chinese would be happy to see Sihanouk restored to power because of their long and close relationship with him, Hanoi is far more wary. The North Vietnamese, like their clients among the insurgents, recognize that Sihanouk contributes unique and valuable assets to their side, but they are as aware as he is of their long history of mutual antipathy, and they have a healthy respect for his skills as a broken-field political runner. Thus they are happy to see him acting as the mouthpiece of the insurgents, but they must view the prospect of his return to Phnom Penh, even as a figurehead, with some trepidation. We see no signs at present, however, that Hanoi is in any way seeking to block negotiations by our side with Sihanouk. Wary as they are, the North Vietnamese would apparently accept his participation in a coalition so long as the role of the insurgents under their influence was not drastically circumscribed in the course of setting it up.

9. The fact that some elements within the insurgency probably are equally opposed to the return of Sihanouk and to Vietnamese Communist domination of their movement and country, suggests certain opportunities for a Soviet role in influencing the outcome in Cambodia. Moscow has maintained that a settlement

should be arranged between the Phnom Penh government and the insurgents, and that Sihanouk--a friend of the Chinese--should be kept out of the picture. In view of the Soviet refusal to break diplomatic ties with Phnom Penh and recognize Sihanouk's "government," it seems unlikely that the Soviets have developed very much influence within the insurgency, except possibly among its stronger nationalists who might be seeking a counterweight to Peking or Hanoi. There is, in fact, no history of any significant Soviet links with the Cambodian left-wing and no reliable evidence of a separate Moscow-oriented group among the insurgency.

10. Recently the Phnom Penh government has sought--apparently with no success--to use the Soviets as intermediaries in making contact with the insurgents. Moscow, meanwhile, has begun to pay more attention to Sihanouk in its propaganda and on the diplomatic front, probably sensing that Sihanouk's position has been enhanced by recent developments. At this juncture, it seems unlikely that the Soviets will push negotiations very hard. They will probably realize that their ability to influence the situation is limited, and will be satisfied with any outcome in Cambodia that does not give the Chinese a totally dominant position.

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